

June 18 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 1999

Statement on House Action on Gun Control Legislation

June 18, 1999

Instead of closing the deadly gun show loophole, the House of Representatives voted in the dark of night to let criminals keep buying guns at gun shows. This vote will not stand the light of day. I will keep working until the Congress

stands up to the gun lobby and makes the commonsense measures passed by the Senate the law of the land. We owe it to the families of the children who died in Littleton to give all Americans the safety they deserve.

Statement on House Action on Gun Control Legislation

June 18, 1999

This week, instead of listening to the American people and strengthening our gun laws, the House of Representatives listened to the gun lobby and did nothing at all. The House leadership gutted this bill in the dark of night to keep commonsense gun legislation from seeing the light of day.

The American people will not stand for this. Our Nation is waiting for Washington to pass a real law that keeps guns away from children and out of the hands of criminals. I call on the Congress to stop playing politics and start living up to its responsibility to help save lives.

Statement on the G-7 Agreement on Debt Relief for Poor Nations

June 18, 1999

The G-7 agreement we reached today is an historic step to help the world's poorest nations achieve sustained growth and independence while targeting new resources for poverty reduc-

tion, education, and combating AIDS. It represents a sound, humane effort to promote widely shared prosperity in the new millennium.

Remarks on the Agreement on Russian Participation in KFOR and an Exchange With Reporters in Cologne

June 18, 1999

The President. Let me say, first of all, how pleased I am and appreciative I am for the efforts made by Secretary Cohen and Defense Minister Sergeyev to reach the agreement under which the Russian forces will join KFOR in Kosovo.

I have been briefed on the terms of the agreement. They provide for unity of command. They provide for a significant range of responsibilities for the Russians, which I think are entirely appropriate and will enhance the mission's

effectiveness. And I am fully supportive of this agreement and very pleased by it.

This has been a good day. We are achieving our objectives now. We know that we have 35,000 Serb forces out, 19,000 KFOR forces in. Now we have the agreement with the Russians, and the Kosovars are going home. So I feel very good and very grateful for this.

And again, I know that Secretary Cohen and Mr. Sergeyev have worked very hard, and I'd also like to thank Secretary Albright and Foreign

Minister Ivanov, because I know they've been also in Helsinki working away. So I'm very pleased.

Q. What will the Russian troops be doing, and why is it significant that they would not control a sector of their own?

The President. Well, for one—the main reason is they are actually needed in more than one sector.

Q. Why?

The President. Because even though the Serb population of Kosovo is concentrated primarily in one north central sector and then a north-eastern sector, they're actually—the religious and cultural sites are spread throughout the country and there are pockets of Serbs throughout the country, and we think it's quite important that every effort be made to secure both the physical sites and the personal security of the Serb minority, as well as the Kosovar-Albanian majority. And we think it will give confidence to them if the Russians are in more than one sector.

Q. Will the Russians answer to the NATO commanders?

The President. They have worked out their agreements on unity of command, and Secretary Cohen and Mr. Sergeyev are discussing it now—I think the briefing is going on now, so there's no point in my trying to answer their questions for them. They'd do a better job than I would, and if made a mistake, just have to clean it up.

Q. Is this better than Bosnia, sir?

Gun Control Legislation

Q. The House vote to kill the gun legislation—was that inevitable to kill the legislation because of changes the House wanted to make on gun control and the background checks?

The President. Did they do that today?

Q. I think they're about to.

The President. They're going to kill it all?

Q. They have killed it all.

Q. They have.

The President. Well, then maybe that means we'll go back to square one and pass a good bill.

Q. What happened? A month ago it was so different, wasn't it?

The President. They made a—the decision made by the leadership not to act before Memorial Day gave people—gave the NRA time to mobilize and lobby and put pressure on the

House and gave people's attention time to wander from the heartbreak of Littleton and the determination to do something about it.

But I think people still feel very strongly that there's more we can do to protect our children, and my attention hasn't wandered. I've been working on this for years, and I've seen a lot of ups and downs, so I'm more than happy to keep at it. And I would just urge all the advocates of sensible legislation to keep their spirits up and keep working and keep fighting. And I'll be there with them, and we'll get some things done.

Russian Participation in KFOR

Q. Is this more than Bosnia for the Russians, Mr. President? Is this an enhanced role than what they had in Bosnia?

The President. Yes, I would say so, because—but it's different. You see, in Bosnia, we shared a sector in Bosnia, and we worked very well together. I think all of our people will tell you they were very well pleased. And then the French had a sector and the British had a sector, and there were lots of other countries involved, just as there will be here. There will be nearly 30 countries involved.

But the—we didn't have the same dynamic here. We've got just two ethnic groups, and the Serbs are a small minority, but they're a substantial number of people and they're spread out. You know, of course, I hope that conditions will be such that those ordinary civilians who didn't commit any crimes who left will feel that they can come back, too.

So I think having the Russians there and then playing the administrative role at the airport gives them a broader range of responsibilities, because as I said, I think it's perfectly consistent with the mission. I think it will help us to send the message, to model the message to both groups that we really do want all law-abiding people to be able to live in peace in Kosovo, and we intend to honor our commitments to that end.

So I feel quite good about this, and I've reviewed the, as I said, the terms of command and control and the basic elements. I think it will work. My test about all this has always been, will it work; will it bring the Kosovars home; will it enable them to live in safety with self-government; will it enable us to protect everyone's religious and cultural and other appropriate sites? I think the answers to all those

questions, if this agreement is faithfully implemented—and I believe it will be—the answers to those questions are yes.

Q. Do you trust the Russians?

The President. Well, we—all I can tell you is, every time I've had an understanding with Boris Yeltsin, he's kept it. And we did work with them on a consistent, long-term basis for years now in Bosnia, and it's worked out. So I believe now that the agreement is worked

out, I think it will be honored. I expect it will be honored.

Q. Despite last week—

The President. Yes, absolutely.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:08 p.m. in front of the Cologne Cathedral. In his remarks, he referred to Minister of Defense Igor Sergeev, Minister of Foreign Affairs Igor Ivanov, and President Boris Yeltsin of Russia. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

The President's Radio Address

June 19, 1999

Good morning. Tomorrow will mark the 2-month anniversary of the terrible school shooting in Littleton, Colorado. This tragedy shocked our Nation and galvanized our determination to protect our children from violence.

Together with the entertainment industry, we're finding new ways to reduce our children's exposure to graphic and gratuitous violence in movies, TV, and video games. Together with parents, teachers, and community leaders, we're talking about how we can increase our involvement in our children's lives and reach out to troubled young people before they act in violence; how together we can form a grassroots campaign against violence directed at young children. Together as a nation, we're searching our hearts and minds for the best way to prevent anything like this from happening again.

Now, one of the most urgent lessons of Littleton and the plea of so many parents who've lost their own children to gun violence is that, to keep our children safe, we simply must do more to keep guns away from young people and out of the hands of criminals.

Time and again, the gun lobby has used every weapon in its arsenal to defeat any effort to strengthen our gun laws, no matter how sensible. This week it, sadly, happened again.

I sent to Congress a very sensible, moderate proposal to apply Brady background checks to gun shows. These are the same simple background checks that have now stopped 400,000 illegal gun sales without stopping a single legitimate purchaser from buying a gun over the last 5 years. Thanks to a tie-breaking vote by

Vice President Gore, the Senate did the right thing and passed this measure. But the sound of the gavel hadn't died in the Senate Chamber before the gun lobby set its sights on the bill before the House of Representatives.

This week the House of Representatives gutted our bill in the dark of night—literally, after midnight—because the gun lobby didn't want commonsense gun legislation to see the light of day.

That is unacceptable. We can't allow the gun lobby to rewrite our laws and undermine our values. So today, again, I say to Congress: You've still got an opportunity, and you've still got an obligation to do the right thing and pass real legislation that will strengthen our gun laws, not weaken them. Pass a law that applies to all gun shows, not one that lets criminals turn flea markets and parking lots into gun bazaars. Pass a law that gives law enforcement enough time to run real background checks, not one that lets more criminals slip through the cracks. Pass a law that closes the deadly gun show loophole once and for all.

Try this: Before you send me that final bill, ask yourselves questions that are on every American's mind: Will this bill make it easier or harder for criminals to get guns? Will more lives be lost or more lives be saved? Is this about politics or putting our children's safety first?

I say to the gun lobby again: I wish you would help us. Nobody is going to be hurt by this legislation. But we've overcome your scare tactics and strong-arm pressure before. We did it with the Brady law; we did it with the assault